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ABSTRACT

This paper describes procedures that can be used in individual schools to evaluate various aspects of their English programs. The major portion of the paper discusses schools' ability to foster voluntary reading, in the face of the widely reported decline in such reading after grade eight. Specific suggestions are given for bridging the gap between juvenile and adult reading, ranging from the types of reading material that are appropriate, to changes in the nature of the reading program itself. The final section of the paper describes procedures for the measurement of growth in writing abilities. (AA)

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Measurement Strategies for English Supervisors and Department Heads *

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Ever since 1935 I have been visiting high schools and junior colleges in many parts of the country, helping them to devise ways to detect and, if possible, to measure the results of their programs. I do not have much first-hand experience with the programs or results of elementary schools, but I am fairly familiar with studies of English instruction at this level, on which more research has been concentrated than on all other levels combined. In an exhaustive ETS survey of research on reading between 1960 and 1970, the following numbers of studies were rated "acceptable" by standards set by the Office of Education:

Grades	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	College	Adult
Acceptable	161	38	25	12	10	5

To sum up these figures, there were 161 "acceptable" studies of reading in grades 1-3 as compared with 90 at all higher levels.

The upshot of all this research on beginning reading, as I see it, is that nothing makes any lasting difference. Some direct instruction in phonics and use of the initial teaching alphabet show superior results by the end of the first grade, but all such effects of methods or materials tend to disappear by the end of the second or third grade. Good teaching, of course, makes a difference, but classes that have a good teacher in one of these grades are likely to have an average or poor teacher in the other two, so that all start even in grade 4, apart from the inevitable effects of an impoverished or enriched home background.

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Such differences in achievement between children of rich or poor parents have caused a great stir in recent years, but I happened to notice two widely separated graphs in a bulky ETS report on a longitudinal study that gave me a different perspective. In an early chapter there was a graph showing the usual difference in reading skill between white and black students in the same school districts in several cities. In a later chapter there was another graph showing almost identical differences between girls and boys--both races, same districts. True, white girls were ahead of black girls, and white boys ahead of black boys, but there was almost the same difference between the sexes as between the races.

No one gets excited by the fact that girls tend to read better than boys; no one argues that girls are genetically superior to boys, or that instruction is sexist oriented in favor of girls. But when the same difference appears between whites and blacks, we get elaborate statistical studies purporting to show what proportion of the difference is attributable to heredity and equally elaborate refutations of these contentions. In my opinion this is making a mountain out of a molehill. In our culture under present conditions it is natural for girls to be more interested in reading than boys, and for whites to be more interested than blacks. As conditions and expectations change, the difference in interest will probably diminish, and the difference in achievement will follow.

Another bit of information supports my optimism. According to Census Bureau reports, 100 years ago the Negro illiteracy rate was 80%; 50 years ago it was 23%; even 10 years ago it was 7.5%. Although it is still 3.6% as compared with 0.7% for whites, the difference lies mainly in those over 45. In the group aged 16 to 24, the illiteracy rate is 0.6% for Negroes and 0.2% for whites. The reduction to less than one percent in the present generation is remarkable, and the drive toward equality of educational opportunity may soon reduce it to zero.

All in all, I am not discouraged by the numerous studies of early reading. With the usual allowance for failure in all human enterprises, we seem to know how to get nearly all children started in reading, regardless of differences in methods, materials, and teaching skill. From grade 4 onward at least the middle half of our students in reading skill read an astonishing number of books written for juveniles, while the top quarter do that plus occasional forays into books written for adults. The curve of growth in voluntary reading reaches a peak in or near grade 8, age 13, when something happens that worries me a great deal. According to reports I have received from supervisors of independent reading programs in many parts of the country, the number of books read voluntarily declines by 20 to 30 percent between grades 8 and 9, and this decline continues at a slower rate in each succeeding grade.

There is a curious fact about this sudden drop in voluntary reading at this stage of growth. In 1938 Douglas Waples of the University of Chicago, after a long series of community studies of reading, reported that the greatest amount of book reading for pleasure was being done by eighth graders, and that voluntary reading declined in each subsequent grade. Since that time two massive cultural forces should have changed the picture for better or worse: the introduction of television on one hand and paperback books on the other. As for television, I doubt that it is responsible for the sudden loss of interest in books between grades 8 and 9, because students watch no more in grade 9 than in grade 8, when they were reading far more books. Paperbacks, however, produced what appears to be a reading explosion. B[illegible]en 1940 and 1960, while our population increased 37%, newspaper sales increased 45%, magazine sales 110%, and book sales a whopping 445%! These figures refer to the number of copies sold, not to dollar values. Reasons for the dramatic increase in book sales are obvious when one examines the paperback book racks in any drugstore. These books are readily accessible; they are relatively cheap; they are so small that they do not frighten slow readers; they appeal to every type of interest and every level of taste; and a lot of them are spicy, if one may judge by the pictures on their covers.

Yet I am forced to believe that the bulk of this book-buying is still done by a minority. In a nationwide Gallup survey, reported in TIME, July 1965, 77% of the adults questioned said that they had not read a whole book during the past year. This finding is consistent with that of a recent ETS survey of over 5,000 adults, a completely representative sample of the national population. Our figure showed a somewhat higher proportion of book readers than Gallup's, but it included the reading of

parts of books for information and the daily reading of short passages from the Bible, notably by people of lower than average income.

For all our educational achievement, of which we have good reason to be proud, we are not yet a nation of book-readers, and we tend to lose the habit of reading books above grade 8. The supervisors of independent reading programs and I wondered what happened at this stage of growth that was deep enough and powerful enough to extend from coast to coast and to remain unchanged from 1938 to the middle sixties, despite the conflicting forces of television and paperbacks. We thought of the increased pressure of homework, and it may indeed be a factor, but we found that students who did the most homework also read the most books on their own. We thought of dating and other social activities, but they did not seem serious enough at this early age to account for the large drop in book reading.

We finally came around to the fact that what happens to everybody, everywhere, at or near this time is the onset of puberty. That is strong enough to crack rocks, but how could it possibly affect reading? We finally decided to work on the hypothesis that this is the point at which the middle half of our students in reading skill have to make a transition from juvenile to adult books if their reading interests are to continue. The top quarter have already made this transition; the bottom quarter have never acquired the habit of reading books for pleasure and hence cannot lose it. But the middle half have been reading the series of school stories and adventure stories that are popular with pre-adolescents, and at this point they begin to seem childish. One cannot go on reading Nancy Drew or the Hardy Boys indefinitely. But the gap between this point and even Erle Stanley

Gardner or Agatha Christie may be wider than we have ever suspected, and a surprising number of students never cross it. They probably constitute the 77% who will later tell George Gallup that they have not read a whole book during the past year.

I realize that my picture of the decline in voluntary reading above grade 8 conflicts with other reports based on the numbers and even titles of books that students say they have read during the past month or so. I have also used this easy source of information, and I find that it grossly exaggerates the number of books actually read as revealed by the exact records kept in our independent reading rooms. Students tend to put down every title they remember, including such titles as The Rise of Silas Mariner, The Scarlet Pickwick, and Iliads of the King. Reports based on library circulation and book sales obviously reflect the reading interests of a select group.

This brings me to my first suggestion for the measurement of growth in what I regard as the most important outcome of English instruction: the habit of reading books on one's own. In my experience, the mind does not continue to grow unless it is nourished by books, and television is no substitute. I wish all of my measures of growth could be as simple, quick, non-threatening, and immediately helpful as this one. It consists of a supply of 3 x 5 index cards. In our independent reading rooms, as soon as a student finishes a book or decides to give it up, he tries to return it, but the student aide tells him, "I can't check it in until you fill out one of these cards." On the top line the student writes his name, grade, and the date; on the second line, author and title. Then there are three things to check: type of book, indicated by a number from a list of fifteen types of fiction and fifteen of

nonfiction; liking on a scale from 1 to 5; and difficulty: easy, medium, or hard. Then comes the payoff: a candid comment for the benefit of other students who are looking for something to read that is likely to interest them. At first these comments are stilted and superficial, but as students see their friends using these cards to help them select books, and have been bawled out for misrepresenting a book that the reader regards as worthless, their comments become more and more candid. Some of their comments on books that I like make my hair stand on end, but we have agreed that there must be no reprisals, or the cards would soon lose their value for both students and teachers.

We usually file these cards alphabetically by name of student in a separate box for each grade and keep them in the same reading room for two or three years, after which the older cards are retired. The student aide also asks each student who returns a book whether he has read any other book that he got from home, a friend, a bookstore, or a library. If so, the student fills out similar cards for such books. This takes only a minute per card--a far cry from the detested book reports that usually give only a garbled summary of the plot, despite instructions to the contrary, and are of no use to other students unless they can be borrowed and copied. By contrast, in every period of independent reading, one sees students consulting these cards to find out what their friends have been reading and which books they have recommended with warmest enthusiasm. If most of their friends have already read nine books while they have read only four, they feel an urge to catch up. Supervisors of these rooms find the cards equally valuable. When a student comes in to talk over his reading and to get suggestions for further reading, they can find out at once what kinds of books he has read, how well he likes each kind, and what fields he has not yet

explored. The cards also keep suggestions for further reading realistic. If a student is reading at the level of Zane Grey, the supervisor is not likely to recommend Thomas Hardy or Henry James.

Neither the quantity nor the quality of independent reading as revealed by these cards should affect the grade in English. If students ploughed through a large number of books and struggled with books that were over their heads in order to get a high grade, it would defeat the purpose of the program, which is to maintain the habit of reading books simply because one likes to. If grades are used as a spur, the habit will vanish as soon as the spur is removed. In this field evaluation should be concerned with classes, not individuals. At the end of each quarter or semester, the supervisors may tabulate the total number of books read by each class, separately by boys and by girls, the number of books of each type, the average enjoyment of each type, and the average difficulty as expressed on the cards. All numbers may be reduced to averages in order to equate large and small classes. One may also indicate what students liked or disliked about the most widely read books as indicated by the comments. It was this sort of tabulation that led to our discovery that voluntary reading declines above grade 8, and further study showed that it was the middle half of the students in reading skill who were primarily affected. This important finding led to a great deal of research on causes of the failure of this group to make the transition to adult books, and on what could be done to help them.

One cause was so obvious that even students noticed it: the harder vocabulary of adult books. Both authors and editors of juveniles constantly change hard words and expressions to simpler ones that even dull students understand, but adult books make no such

concessions. To ease this burden, some colleagues and I went to a great deal of trouble to find out which words from the sixth through the twentieth thousand in frequency of occurrence in general reading students in grades 11 and 13 did not understand, and we prepared four programmed workbooks, each accompanied by a separate book of tests, to help them learn these words. The distinctive feature of these workbooks is the large amount of practice provided on the use of each word. Counting the tests, the student sees each entry word in 14 complete sentence contexts, 13 of which call for some sort of response on his part, and in two items calling for a choice among four brief definitions. The most common type of exercise consists of sentences using the word correctly or incorrectly, and the student marks them R (right) or W (wrong). A key at the bottom, arranged in a different order, enables him to check his own work. Premature use of the key is discouraged by the fact that the student gets no credit for the exercises but only for the tests, which have no right answers in sight. The incorrect sentences are unmistakably wrong; there are no fine distinctions at this stage of initial learning. Sometimes the incorrect sentences have a touch of humor, as in "Lawrence of Arabia crossed the desert on an apothecary."

We designed these workbooks for grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 for two reasons: first, these words occur mainly in adult books, not in juveniles; second, we thought students would not take kindly to drill on vocabulary apart from their reading until their vocabulary problems were beginning to hurt, as they do in grades 9-12. Although these books helped, it soon became obvious that something drastic ought to be done about vocabulary development in grades 5 through 8 in order to prepare for the transition. Jeanne Chall

showed that publishers of basal readers have adopted an arbitrary standard of introducing not more than two new words per 100 words of text, and they stick to it long after the point at which it makes any sense. Such a gradual enlargement of reading vocabulary leaves the average student unable to cope with even such a simple book as Silas Marner, let alone the harder Ivanhoe and Great Expectations, which are most widely taught in grade 9. I wish publishers would not count as "new" any words that can be decoded on the basis of words already known. If students know sing and wing, they should be able to combine them in swing. I also wish they would leave off counting after they have worked up to a recognition vocabulary of about 1,500 words. Even when I was writing stories in Latin, I found that after students had mastered about 1,500 of the most common words, any new word I introduced thereafter was likely to be surrounded by so many familiar words that students could guess its meaning from the context.

Meanwhile, what can we do to help the less able readers make the transition to adult books? First, let us not misconceive the problem. Too many teachers think of it as the transition from juveniles to the classics. That is obviously too big a jump. It is better to think of it as the transition from Nancy Drew to Agatha Christie.

Second, let us not try to teach a play by Shakespeare in every grade from 7 onward. That tradition originated when there was a heavy dropout after each of these grades, and English teachers could not bear the thought that anyone would leave school without at least a taste of our greatest author. Now that we retain most students through grades 11 or 12, I wish we could postpone Shakespeare until these grades and then read several plays at a more rapid pace than at present, when teachers have to explain the meaning of every difficult passage.

Third, let us not rely too heavily on well-written stories about teenagers. They help, but they do not meet the basic need. These young people are on the threshold of adulthood. They want to come to terms with the world of adults: to understand the crazy things that adults do and say and care about. To satisfy this hunger, he have to provide reading matter, carefully graded in difficulty, that deals with the interests and concerns of adults.

Fourth, one abundant source of such reading matter that can usually be obtained without cost or at very low cost is the daily newspaper. It offers the simplest and clearest prose written for adults and deals with the interests and concerns of adults. Its articles are short and varied in form and content. It appeals even to poor readers in low-income neighborhoods because it is real; it tells about events that have just happened and about people who are making hard decisions; and it is more obviously relevant to the conduct of our affairs than most schoolbooks.

There is a very large program to bring this material to schools that too few educators know about. At the time of the last survey, this "Newspaper in the Classroom" program was supported by 364 newspapers in the United States and Canada and reached approximately 34,000 schools, 95,000 teachers, and over 5 million students annually with over 50 million copies of daily newspapers, 60% free and the rest usually at half price. Last year these newspapers sponsored at least 90 institutes and workshops on educational uses of newspapers, and about the same number of programs for credit were offered by colleges and universities. It is conservatively estimated that during the past 20 years newspaper publishers have spent over $60 million in support of this program without hope of any immediate return and without any restrictions on the use of newspapers by teachers.

Beginning in 1967, The American Newspapers Publishers Association (ANPA) Foundation supported the development of a test of newspaper reading with the assistance of ETS. Two simulated newspapers of four pages each were written and edited by skilled journalists, and they were not "written down." Newspaper teachers wrote test questions on everything in these newspapers that students might not understand. The questions were not intended to be hard or tricky. The rule was that if a student understood an article, he should be able to answer the questions that were asked about it. Students answered these questions as they read the articles to which they referred; they did not study the newspapers in advance. Four hundred questions were tried out in matched newspaper and regular classes in 61 schools, and only those questions were retained on which newspaper classes did better than regular classes of equal ability in general reading. Analysis of the selected questions revealed 30 distinguishable types of skill, knowledge, and judgment that might be expected to emerge from regular exposure to and discussion of good newspapers. Only one item in each form dealt with technical terms such as dateline or masthead.

Norms were established by administering the four forms of the test to 13,000 students in three areas--Fort Worth, Peoria, and Charlotte, N.C.--representing middle size cities in different regions served by respected newspapers with long-established newspaper programs. Two important conclusions were warranted by the results:

1. The average regular student (without newspaper instruction) in junior high school could answer less than 50%, and in senior high school less than 60%, of fair, straightforward questions on typical newspaper articles.

2. Newspaper programs of whatever sorts were operating in these areas at this time produced significant improvement in newspaper reading.

Thirteen percent more newspaper students than regular students answered half or more of the questions correctly in both junior and senior high schools.

The most serious question these findings left in our minds was whether the country is safe in the hands of the great majority of students without newspaper instruction who, roughly speaking, understand less than half of what they read in newspapers in junior high and less than 60% in senior high. The ETS survey I have previously mentioned of the reading of over 5,000 adults showed that newspapers were by far the largest item in daily reading: 73% reported reading newspapers during the day preceding the interview; 39% reported reading magazines; and 33% reported reading some part of a book. Since newspaper reading is so common and so important in the conduct of our affairs, surely schools have an obligation to find out how well their students read newspapers and to do what they can to remedy their deficiencies. An important by-product may be increased ability to read adult books. Several researchers have reported gains of up to two years in general reading ability as a result of one semester of newspaper study.

Since I have devoted so much time to newspapers, you may have forgotten that they were fourth in a list of suggestions for bridging the gap between juvenile and adult reading. The first was to regard the problem as a transition from Nancy Drew to Agatha Christie, not as a transition from Nancy Drew to Shakespeare. The second was to postpone Shakespeare to grades 11 and 12 and then to read several plays rapidly. The third was not to rely upon books about teenagers at a time when teenagers are longing for adulthood. The fourth was to use newspapers as an introduction to the world of adults. Since I do not know how to solve all your problems, I have just two more suggestions in regard to reading, one of which I have foreshadowed by repeated references to independent reading.

I wish all of you would adopt a practice that is now common in the more advanced schools: offering two periods a week of independent reading as a regular elective with status and credit equal to any other elective but without grades. This may be either an addition to or a substitute for class instruction. In Detroit, beginning in 1960, backed by a generous grant from the Ford Foundation, I made the substitution mandatory for all teachers who could be persuaded to enter the program. The weekly schedule of these classes included one large-group presentation on Monday, two small-group discussions of books and papers on either Tuesday and Wednesday or Thursday and Friday, and two periods of independent reading on days when students did not have small-group discussions. This schedule reduced class size in small-group discussions to 18 or fewer students; now it is 15 or fewer. Students were scheduled into the independent reading rooms, usually converted study halls that could accommodate up to 80 students. They had a basic stock of 1,250 carefully selected books, mainly paperbacks, and about 100 titles were usually added each year. The cost of replacing books that were worn out or stolen was offset by sales of paperbacks in a room near the entrance to the cafeteria. The independent reading was first supervised by college-educated housewives, selected and trained by librarians and department heads. They were on duty about three hours per day in either the morning or the afternoon, and they were paid three dollars per hour. The total cost of this independent reading program was found to be about one-fourth the cost of an equal number of student-hours of instruction.

The large-group presentations were usually televised and taped in the downtown studio of a closed-circuit television network that reached all schools. The viewing rooms had as many as six large screens so that

every student had a clear view. Only the most accomplished lecturers and demonstrators were used. They had a month to prepare each program, and they were often assisted by guests such as writers and editors, a panel of teachers, or a panel of articulate students. Since the programs were taped, they could be repeated in every period to fit the schedule of all classes that wanted to see them.

The programs were not directly related to the small-group discussions of books and papers. The department decided that certain parts of the English program could be taught most effectively by large-group presentations while other parts required discussion in groups small enough for every student to have a chance to speak. Since only a few teachers were involved in the televised presentations, all other teachers had this day free for departmental meetings, planning small-group discussions, preparing tests and other evaluative procedures and analyzing their results, reading student papers, and conferring with students who needed special help--remedial at one end of the scale and tutorial at the other. Conservative teachers predicted that this drastic reduction in teacher loads and class time would be scrapped as soon as scores on College Board tests were revealed, but these scores did not change one iota, either for better or worse. The conservatives then changed their tune: "See! All this cataclysmic change made no difference." But it did. Both students and teachers enjoyed the new program more than ever before. English changed from a grim task to an adventure.

Whenever I describe the independent reading program to teachers who have not seen it in operation, they smile brightly and say, "Yes, I do the same thing but without all this machinery. Once a week or so I let my students just read while I call one after another to my desk for a brief conference. To be sure, I have only a three-foot shelf of books and cannot allow students to check them out, but if they get through even two or three, that is all to the good."

I have to reply, "No, that is not the same thing at all. The buzz of conversation at the desk distracts attention from reading, and only trivial matters can be discussed with students in this goldfish-bowl setting. When we hold serious conferences with students in our private offices in college, even some of our husky athletic types have been known to break down and cry. You will never get that intensity of emotion or that effect on behavior in your two-minute discussions of parallel structure and dangling participles. And both the kind and amount of independent reading you provide are scandalously inadequate to affect the steady decline in voluntary reading. Students need at least a thousand books to choose from; they must be scheduled into rooms that are used exclusively for reading books of their own choice; and they must be allowed to check books out to finish at home. You say that you let the students 'just read.' Do you realize that 'just reading' is the most important outcome of English instruction and that nothing must be allowed to interfere with it--not even an excessive load of homework in English or other subjects? It is essential to intellectual survival."

True independent reading programs are also the answer I favor to the need for varied types and levels of books to suit different abilities and interests. The competing answer is the thematic approach in which one chooses a topic or problem, such as "Conflict," for each unit and suggests five or six books related to this theme among which students may choose. Since I do not have time to do justice to some masterly uses of this approach that I have seen, I shall simply state my prejudice against it. I think it promotes the worst feature of most literary instruction: namely, discussion of the subject of a book rather than of what the book says and how it is put together. Suppose one student has read The Scarlet Letter while another has read a translation of

Madame Bovary. What can they discuss except "Adultery Then and Now"? As an English teacher I am not interested in getting their views on adultery. I want all students in that group to be reading The Scarlet Letter and to argue with one another over what certain paragraphs mean, imply, symbolize, or foreshadow. The key to my appraisal of a period devoted to literary study is the extent to which students argue with one another while the teacher acts mainly as chairperson and referee.

My final suggestion is based on an experience of my own, in conducting remedial English classes at the University of Chicago, but the moral applies to all classes based on discussion. I was an examiner in English for the U.S. Armed Forces Institute during World War II, and I gradually accumulated a large file of interesting tests on long passages from literary works and on student papers related to these passages. Since I had often thought that disused tests might provide effective instructional material, I asked the Dean for permission to use them in remedial English classes. Since nothing could happen to these students that was worse than what had already happened, the Dean assented. The students took these tests as homework and argued with one another in class the following day over items on which there was a substantial difference of opinion. I numbered rather than lettered the responses to each item because it is impossible to distinguish B from D in classroom conversation. After kidding the students a bit about how hard the test had been, I would ask "What did you do with Item 1?" Each student held up one, two, three, or four fingers to indicate which answer he had chosen. If the intended answer was 3 and nearly all students had chosen it, I went on to the next item. Then, if one faction wanted response 2 and another 4, I would ask Joe to explain why he picked 2 and Mary why she picked 4. Next, I might ask Joe to reply to Mary's argument and Mary to reply to Joe's. "Does anyone else have a

reason?" By this time, hands would be waving all over the room, and all I had to do was to recognize students who were bursting to speak. If the reason they presented was not clear, I might ask "Do you mean this--or that?" When the arguments began to repeat themselves, I would say, "That's enough. We now have plenty of reasons to make a rational decision. How many now prefer 2? How many 4? The 4's have it. If you still want to argue, take it up after class with someone who chose 4. Let's get on."

Students were put into this class only if they answered less than 40% of the questions correctly in a test that was like the exercises on which we worked in every class meeting. They could get out only if they answered 60% or more of the questions correctly in a parallel test that was given at the end of every quarter. After the first year, based on my own experience and that of colleagues who taught this course in the same way, I could tell each new class, "About two-thirds of you will make it by Christmas. Nearly everyone else will make it by Easter. That will leave only a handful of students who will get individual instruction."

This meant that most students made a minimum gain of 20% correct in three months on the highly predictive test we used during Freshman Week, and this put them at the level of our average entrant. But this evidence did not satisfy me. They might have become adept at answering the kinds of questions we put into these tests without any real improvement in reading or writing. So I matched the first 70 students who finished this program with 70 students who had similar scores on our screening tests but had not taken the remedial program. All the rest of their courses were the same. My group failed 31 comprehensive examinations in all subjects during their first year in college while the control group failed 54. This finding convinced me and all subsequent classes that what they learned by arguing with one another over problems in reading and writing

would help them not only in English but also in everything else that the college tried to teach.

The moral, as I said, applies to more than use of this technique. All of us who taught this course agreed that the best policy was to tell the students as little as possible. At first we had to prime the pump in order to show students what kinds of reasons they could use to support their answers, and once in a while we might jog them by such a question as "Have you considered what it says in line 16?" But whenever we lost patience and simply told them the right answer and why it was correct, we could tell by the lowering of eyes that they were not listening; they were considering how to defend their answer to the next question. I realize that this technique might not work with younger classes of inarticulate students, but the general principle remains: tell them nothing. Give them problems of interpretation and expression that they can handle if they try hard, and let them argue with one another until they reach something like a rational decision.

I have deliberately left only a short time for the measurement of growth in writing because all I know about it is thoroughly covered in my little book, Measuring Growth in English, that was published by our National Council in 1974. I do not want to deprive you of the pleasure of owning a copy for several reasons. First, it is the only book on measurement that can be read for pleasure. Second, it can be understood by anyone who can add and compute percentages. Third, practically everything in it will be new to you. Fourth, I know that the procedures I recommend will work because I have used them myself and lived with them--not just once but year after year. Fifth, although the measures are designed to prove something that will disconcert our critics, their

primary purpose is to improve teaching and learning. Sixth and last, these measures will save you a great deal of time, work, and worry. Teachers spend far more time than is necessary on testing, grading, record-keeping, and reporting. I can show you how to cut this burden down to size by fewer and better measures at longer intervals of time. At other times teachers should be free to devote their whole minds to teaching and students to learning.

My favorite device for showing how much writing improves from grade to grade is to have all students in a span of three grades, such as 7-8-9 or 10-11-12, write a short paper on the same topic and on the same day but not in the same period. Students number their own papers with any number of six figures that pops into their heads, such as 901,222 or 003,489. They copy this number on a separate name-slip and add their name, grade, teacher, and any other information that may be required. Both papers and name-slips are arranged in the numerical order of these self-chosen numbers, which puts them in an obviously random order, and the name-slips are locked up until the grading is completed. This arrangement brings duplicate numbers together. Then we match handwriting on the paper with handwriting on the name-slip and change the last digit of one number in order to distinguish these papers. We once found 14 papers from one class that all used the same number, obviously by collusion. We called these students in and scared them by saying that they would have to write another paper, but we finally agreed to forgive them if each student would find his own paper and identify it by a different number. They never tried this trick again.

Then we divide the papers into as many stacks as there are teachers to grade them and have them graded over the weekend. In this case, when we are only trying to detect improvement from grade to grade, I do not

insist on
/ independent grading of each paper by two different teachers, as I do when the grades will enter the record of each student. I do, however, insist on comparable standards in regard to leniency or severity. Left to themselves, some teachers will give mainly A's and B's with a few C's; others will give mainly C's and D's with an unreasonable number of E's. Such differences in grading standards reduce the difference from one grade to the next and minimize the improvement that actually occurs. To prevent this, I ask all teachers to sort their papers on their first reading into three piles: top quarter in general merit, middle half, and bottom quarter. My own standards for this sorting are "This paper interests me: high; this paper does not interest me: middle; this paper nauseates me: low." On a second reading, teachers move a few papers upward or downward if they seem out of line with other papers in their pile, or if the piles do not conform to the standard of top quarter, middle half, and bottom quarter. Then they pick out a fifth of the papers in the top pile as the very high and a fifth of the papers in the bottom pile as the very low. That results in five piles with 5%, 20%, 50%, 20%, and 5% of the papers in each pile from low to high. The advantage of this distribution is that the middle papers in these piles are almost exactly one standard deviation apart. You need not understand what this means or why it is important; you can find out from my book; but take my word for it that it <u>is</u> important whenever you have to add grades on essays to scores on objective tests. To keep these off-the-record grades in line with later grades on test essays that will count, I ask teachers to mark all papers in the lowest pile 10; in the second, 20; in the third, 30; in the fourth, 40; and in the fifth, 50. Finally, they rearrange all papers in the same numerical order of paper-numbers in which they received them.

After all papers with these grades have been returned on Monday morning, the department head has a clerk or aide transfer the grade on each paper to the corresponding name-slip. This is easy, because the papers and name-slips are, or ought to be, in the same numerical order. Then the clerk sorts the name-slips into piles for grades 7-8-9, 10-11-12, or whatever grades have written the papers. In senior high, these piles are often subdivided into separate piles for academic and nonacademic students: the first including both college prep and business, the second vocational and general. Finally the name-slips in each pile are sorted into just three levels: HIGH, including both 40's and 50's; MIDDLE, all 30's; and LOW, both 20's and 10's. Reporting results for each grade in each curriculum in just three levels of general merit gives a picture of growth from grade to grade that even school boards and parents can understand. It seems to get back to just the original sorting into top quarter, middle half, and bottom quarter, and you may wonder why I insist on the further step of picking out 5% of very high and very low papers. The latter is necessary if we want to compute the amount of growth from one grade to the next in terms of average ratings.

In my book on page 15 I give results for grades 10-11-12 in a senior high school that stood at the national average in verbal ability. The figures were convincing because eight teachers had rated over a thousand papers without knowing who wrote the papers or what grade or curriculum they came from. The improvement of the academics is best shown by the percent who received high ratings: 22% in grade 10, 41% in grade 11, and 53% in grade 12. Since the teachers did not know which papers came from which grades, how can you explain this rise in percentages unless the twelfth grade papers were actually better than the tenth?

The improvement of the nonacademic students is best shown by the decline in the percent who received low ratings: 61% in grade 10, 39% in grade 11, and 28% in grade 12. That really warmed my heart. Although these nonverbal students cannot hope to become really good writers, fewer than half as many in grade 12 wrote papers that would disgrace the school as in grade 10.

Before this little weekend experiment I asked these eight teachers how they thought the improvement of the nonacademics would compare with that of the academics. The most optimistic forecast was that the nonacademics might show half as much improvement. That was far too low. In terms of the scale we were then using, the academics gained on the average 175 points between grade 10 and grade 12; the nonacademics gained an average of 125 points. The ratio of these gains was 7 to 5, not 2 to 1. No one thereafter regarded the teaching of writing to nonacademics as a hopeless task.

Such findings, which have since been repeated in school after school, pretty well spiked the guns of our critics, who contend that students learn nothing about writing in high school. To be sure, the writing of the average high school graduate is still very bad, but we can prove that it improves steadily year by year, in spite of the fact that most teachers run away from the teaching of writing and teach grammar instead. But this leaves us in an awkward position. Most of us are proud of our program in literature and spend more time on it than on anything else, while we tend to dislike the teaching of writing and are ashamed of our results. Yet I have solid evidence from schools in many parts of the country that writing improves slowly but steadily from grade to grade, while the most important outcome of English

instruction, the habit of reading books on one's own, goes steadily downhill from grade 9 onward until the average American adult reads hardly any books. We have the illusion that we are introducing students to the reading of books in grades 9-12 while in reality we are bidding it goodbye--except for the top quarter in reading skill. The heart of that problem, as I see it now, is the failure of the middle half in reading skill to make the transition from juvenile to adult books at or near the end of grade 8. Our Office of Education spends millions of dollars trying to find out how to get children started in reading, which we know how to do well enough for practical purposes, but hardly a cent on the more difficult problem of keeping them going at the point where they stall. That is something that we don't do and don't know how to do, but few of us are even aware of the problem. I have offered a few suggestions, but I can tell you right now that they will not help very much. I sometimes feel that it is a law of nature that not more than a quarter of our people will keep on reading books after they leave school. I hope I am wrong, but it is up to you people to prove that I am wrong.

I have decided to entrust the most sophisticated research I have ever done to a little handout of four pages in which the first page tells about the study and the last three give results that you can use: descriptions of the kinds of student papers that were rated high, middle, or low on qualities that affected the ratings of a large and distinguished group of readers: college teachers of English, social studies, and science as the academic audience; writers and editors, lawyers, and business executives as the nonacademic audience. Each rated 300 papers written by college freshmen in November, before they were irretrievably ruined by college teaching. We correlated the ratings of each reader with those

of each other reader and subjected the results to a complicated mathematical procedure known as factor analysis. It has the effect of picking out clusters of readers who agreed with one another and disagreed with other clusters to a greater extent than could be attributed to chance. We found out what these clusters agreed on by analyzing their comments on the papers. The first and largest cluster had by far the highest percentage of comments on the ideas expressed; the second, on mechanics; the third, on organization and analysis; the fourth, on wording and phrasing; and the fifth, on personal qualities in the writing that we decided to call "flavor." We had hundreds of high school papers rated on these qualities in a study of writing improvement in 12 school districts in the state of New York, but we broke up the mechanics factor into its logical components: usage, punctuation, and spelling. We also added "handwriting, neatness," which could not be detected in our study because we used typed copies, but which appeared in a similar factor analysis in Italy which used the original handwritten papers. After a year, we brought the heads of departments in these districts together in a summer workshop, and we read and discussed typical papers that their teachers had rated high, middle, or low on these qualities until we were able to write brief descriptions of their salient characteristics. If you want to find out what qualities in student writing good readers value, and what sorts of papers merit high, middle, or low ratings on these qualities, you have only to read the handout. It is the shortest report you will ever read on a study that cost $40,000.

Inside each of these four-page folders I have placed a single sheet listing types of mechanical errors that persist through the freshman year in college. I started with a list that John Hodges and his associates compiled from an analysis of 20,000 freshman themes. Then my assistant and I embodied each error in a sentence, broke up the sentence into three lines of about equal length, and asked students to mark the line that contained an error, or 0 if there was no error. We gave these tests in strong academic high schools, mainly on the East Coast, and selected types of errors that were not noticed by at least 10% of the students in grade 12 and by at least 25% in some grade from 9 to 12. The list includes these most common errors, but we had to give up on the analysis of errors in diction (choice of words) because there were too many to classify and there was too much disagreement as to which were errors. For example, we used contact as a verb in a highly formal context:

> Dean Walters asked me to contact
> him in regard to my grade on
> the last English examination.

Only three students in a thousand saw anything wrong with contact. I was relieved, because so many similar nouns become verbs. We use contract as both a noun and a verb, so why not contact?

I am somewhat reluctant to distribute this list of common errors because I think English teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time correcting such errors to the neglect of more important aspects of writing. But they have such different notions of what constitutes an error that

a restricted list of the most frequent errors may serve some purpose. The list also draws attention to some points of usage that editors no longer regard as errors. For what I regard as more important aspects of writing, see the "descriptions" in the four-page folder. *

Let me get in just one last word. The College Board has been testing writing ability ever since 1900. Do you know which one of our tests has consistently yielded the best predictions of grades in freshman composition? It is not a writing test at all but a reading test: the verbal portion of our Scholastic Aptitude Test. More exactly, half of it is reading comprehension and half consists of three types of vocabulary items: analogies, opposites, and completions. But the vocabulary is there primarily because it is highly correlated with reading ability and one can get in three times as many items per minute of testing time, which increases reliability. Hence the saying, "The only way to learn to write is writing," is at best a half-truth. So far as we know from research, the best way to learn to write is to read a lot of books. The next-best is to write a lot of papers--under guidance. So you can see why I have given primary attention to continued voluntary reading in this address. It is essential to intellectual survival. It is essential to the safety of the republic. And it is also essential to the improvement of writing.

*See related document CS203668